DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 139 088 EA 009 500

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TITLE American Education: Past, Present and Future.
PUB DATE 28 Mar 77
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National School Boards Association (37th, Houston, Texas, March 26-29, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Control; *Educational History; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Governance; *Parent School Relationship; Political Influences; *Politics; *Social Change; Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

According to popular analysis, parental objections to busing are generated by a perceived "loss of control" over the education of their children. It is the thesis of this essay that this loss of control began well before the current dispute over busing. It is helpful to view the process of parental political disenfranchisement as one that has occurred in the following phases: Phase 1, the first period of "maximum feasible participation" (1835 to 1900); Phase 2, the period of "reform and efficiency" (1900 to 1968); Phase 3, the period in which the school was viewed as an agent of social and economic change (1954 to 1975); and Phase 4, the period in which the aspirations of Phase 3 will be proven unachievable (1975 -). The loss of control being protested in 1975 actually began at the beginning of Phase 2, the period of reform. American education is in an untenable position because Phase 3 governance cannot achieve its mandate. Whether the goal of economic equality is retained or abandoned, a change in the pattern of control over education seems inevitable. (Author/JG)

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AMERICAN EDUCATION: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Invited Address
11:00 a.m., Monday morning
March 28, 1977

Annual Convention Clinic Session
National School Boards Association
Houston, Texas
March 28, 1977

EA 009 500

As we watch the civic disarray associated with federally mandated busing unfold, we are led to ask the question: What is wrong? This is hardly a new question. It is one which has been asked each time the public education system is made the object of public scrutiny.

According to popular analysis--as reported by the various media providing coverage of the most recent outbreaks of violence in Boston and Louisville--parental objections to busing are generated by a perceived "loss of control" over the education of their children. It is the thesis of this essay that, whatever parents believe about loss of control, the process whereby parents lost control of education began well before the current dispute over busing. It may be true, of course, that the helplessness of parents first became obvious to them when the buses began to roll. Indeed, a more dramatic demonstration of political impotence can hardly be imagined. However, we believe it is helpful to view the process of parental political disenfranchisement as one which has occurred in phases. Accordingly, we offer the following sketch of what has happened to American education: Phase 1, the first period of "Maximum feasible participation" (circa 1835 to circa 1900); Phase 2, the period of "reform" and "efficiency," (1900 to circa 1968); Phase 3, the period in which the school became viewed as an agent of social and economic change (1954 - 1975); and, finally, Phase 4, 1975 - , during which time the aspirations of Phase 3 will be proven unachievable, albeit laudable. We will argue that the "loss of control" being protested in 1975 actually began at the beginning of Phase 2, the period of reform, at the turn of the century.

PHASE I: LAY CONTROL

During Phase 1, the control (actual as well as legal) of American education rested, in general, with local boards of education. Furthermore, in Phase 1 there was substantial opportunity for community members to interact with and influence the members of their boards of education. First, there were more school boards at that time. As late as 1930 there were approximately 130,000 independent school districts; now there are about 15,000 school districts. Since each school district had a school board--in many districts there were multiple boards--the opportunity for participation by either holding office or voting was substantial in Phase 1.

Second, there were more school board members per district during Phase 1. For example, in 1895 there were 28 cities with populations of 100,000 or more. In these 28 cities there were 603 central school board members, an average of 21.5 per city. In addition, in some of the larger cities there were hundreds of neighborhood boards. By 1913 (Phase 2), the 28 cities had but 264 central school board members, an average of 10.2 per city, and neighborhood boards had been abolished. Finally, in Phase 1 most school boards were elected on a ward basis and were, by today's standards, decentralized. Each school board member had an unambiguous constituency to represent and be held accountable by. By 1913 most board members were elected at large. Neighborhoods had lost their spokesmen as school board members were to be responsive to a much larger and heterogeneous constituency.

Although there was considerable variety in patterns of school governance, especially with regard to the problem of division of labor between central and ward boards, it is a fair generalization to say that

lay boards "ran" the schools. Most school board members believed their responsibility to be that of the administration of schools. In larger cities, these duties were shared between central and ward boards. In such cities, the central boards were frequently subdivided into smaller committees to manage specialized tasks (e.g., curriculum, finance, etc.).

As school systems increased in size--due partially to the rapid influx of immigrant groups--lay boards found that they could not effectively keep up with the day to day operation of schools, such as checking attendance and recording examinations. They reasoned that they were quite capable of performing such routine tasks, but simply lacked the time. Thus they commonly appointed a "superintendent." However, the superintendent's responsibilities were usually strictly clerical (many superintendents still retain the title "superintendent-clerk") and did not involve participation in policy decisions such as staffing and curriculum. Clearly, the norm of active lay administration was powerful.

It is a well known axiom of politics that ward based electoral systems favor the lower or working classes, as such people generally live in distinct sections of a city. By providing each section with a representative, an elected body can become more "representative." That is, its social composition is a relatively accurate reflection of the composition of the city as a whole. Such appears to be the case with school boards in Phase 1. Some scholars have argued that the "working class" had "captured" many city wards by the 1880's. In Pittsburgh, for example, the school system consisted of 38 subdistrict boards. Each board possessed authority to levy taxes, and to appoint administrative and teaching personnel. The central board, composed of one

representative from each subdistrict, was virtually powerless. An analysis of the social composition of the subdistrict boards indicates that the socio-economic status of board members was roughly congruent with the status of the populations of the subdistricts.

In addition to achieving "representation," Phase 1 boards were also, to a greater extent than is true today, "responsive." Ward boards governed areas small enough to permit personal attention to problems. To modern readers, familiar with the late 1960's argument for "community control," such a system may seem ideal. A lay board, responsible to a small constituency, able to give personal attention to individual needs, governed education. Who could object?

Reformers objected, and the reform movement in urban politics (Phase 2), marked the beginning of the decline of lay control. Before turning to Phase 2, we should note that the reformers' objections to the 19th century pattern of community control were not without substance. The ward-board electoral system shared all the advantages and disadvantages of the urban political machines of the era. Urban machines, in performing the function of integrating the millions of immigrants into political life, rewarded votes with jobs. Since in most cases local school districts were coterminous with municipal wards, there was naturally a substantial amount of patronage in the awarding of teaching and administrative positions. The currency of political machines was patronage, and in those cities in which machines dominated school politics, patronage played a major role in the schools. On the positive side, political machines were acutely sensitive to the potential alienation of the various ethnic minorities which formed the majority

coalition. In New York, Boss Tweed's ward board of education, for example, did not bother to enforce Protestant values in Catholic neighborhoods, allowed the various native tongues to be taught, and removed textbooks which contained alleged slurs about immigrant groups. Tweed's school system sounds like the promised land to modern critics who decry the loss of cultural identity among minority groups.

On the negative side, machines were—as the reformers charged—"corrupt." They siphoned off funds from building contracts, awarded contracts on the basis of political influence rather than competitive bidding, allowed bribery by textbook salesmen, and in general behaved like machines are alleged to behave. Teachers had to pay machine functionaries for positions, and academic qualifications played a minor role. Thus, school politics, like the machine politics of the urban area of which it was a part, provided responsiveness and corruption. Nevertheless, school policy-making reflected the values of the subgroups within the community. In working class areas, working class values prevailed. In upper class areas, upper class values prevailed. In any case, "the people," for better or worse, were not excluded from the making of educational policy.

PHASE 2: CONTROL BY LOCAL PROFESSIONALS

The reform movement, which began around the beginning of the twentieth century, can be accurately described as one of the WASP elite response to lay control. The movement, by fostering major structural changes in the governing structure of education, was consciously designed to reduce lay responsibility for education. It was clearly a class based movement to shift the response of schools from laymen to

experts, and it succeeded.

To return to one of the points with which this essay began, the loss of parental control lamented in 1975 began long before busing, and was almost complete by the 1920's. However, the enemy of local control was not, during the years of Phase 2, the federal government, but rather the growth of educational professionalism within the local community. Lay control was first destroyed by professionalism, and only later was assaulted by state and national bureaucracies.

The reform movement's major structural modifications were (1) the centralization of school administration, to be accomplished both by the destruction of the authority of community boards, and by the merger of small districts into larger ones, (2) the substitution of a smaller central board, elected at large, for the large, ward-based central board, (3) the election of board members by non-partisan ballots, and (4) the separation of board elections from other municipal and state elections. The major philosophical thrust behind these structural changes was to substitute "scientific management" for political influence. Thus, a necessary corollary for the structural changes was an expansion of the role of the superintendent, to be achieved by a contraction of the role of the board. Reliance on "experts," then, played as large a role in the reform movement as the structural modification to reduce the influence of political machines.

If the political machines, with their strong immigrant base, were designed to give power to "the" people, the upper class response was to provide power to "<u>their</u>" people. While some reformers couched their bias against the lower classes in phrases such as efficiency, others

were quite open in their assertion that only "successful" people should serve on school boards. Such people, presumably from businesses and professions, could be expected to defer to the expertise of the superintendent. Indeed, an essential ingredient to the understanding of Phase 2 is the growth of the superintendency as the major source of educational decision-making.

To understand how superintendents moved from clerk to dominant policy-maker, we first need to note the dramatic shift in the composition of boards of education. Not only did they become fewer and smaller; they also lost the representative character typical of Phase 1. In St. Louis, reformers were successful in persuading the Missouri legislature to press a new charter designating the non-partisan at-large election of twelve (as compared to twenty-eight) school board members. The purpose of this new charter--a purpose which soon became the keynote of the school reform movement--was to take the schools out of "politics", that is, remove the influence of the machine. The charter was approved in 1897. In 1896, professionals and businessmen constituted 14 percent of the board; in 1897 they constituted 83 percent of the board. By 1927, the year of the first systematic national survey of the origins of board members, the St. Louis pattern was the norm. Reformers had succeeded in eliminating the working class by substituting the previous politics of patronage with the "a-political" politics of upper class "public regarding" behavior. Upper class domination of school board members found that 90 percent were male; 96 percent were white; 70 percent were college graduates; 36 percent earned incomes in excess of $30,000; 66 percent were from business and professional occupations;

and 85 percent were Protestant. The reformers had clearly done their work well.

Not only were local boards of education reflective of the social biases of the reformers; their willingness to yield authority to the superintendent, a natural consequence of the business-efficiency orientation of the upper classes, was congruent with the tenets of sound management so clearly a part of the reform ideology. Superintendents moved from clerk to policy-makers because boards wanted them to do so. As the ideological descendant of the reformers, Phase 2 board members were doing a good job; they were leaving the governance to the experts.

But what of the experts? Where did they come from, and how did they become experts? As the reform movement achieved its goals, colleges of education began turning their attention to the production and distribution of experts in educational administration. By 1913 schools of education had become cohesive in their philosophy of education, and well connected with urban reformers. A handful of highly influential educators took the lead in developing an ideology of administration, instilling the ideology in the instruction of future superintendents, and placing their students in key superintendencies. The key points of the ideology, efficiency, "unity" (e.g., minimization of conflict), and professionalism, were welcomed by upper class boards. Schools, like businesses, should be managed by experts. By 1920, the norm of school board non-participation in administration had become so pervasive that superintendents would protest as encroachment lay influence which would have been customary before the turn of the century.

As schools grew larger and more complex, an administrative structure

equal to the task was generated. First, the boards acquiesced in the superintendent's influence; then boards acquiesced in the superintendent's delegation of authority to middle-level administrators. The expert appointed more experts. Boards of education found nothing objectionable. By the 1960's, the average superintendent's professional staff numbered 150. This professional staff administers the largest and most costly governmental activity in most communities, and consequently the position of the superintendent is, in comparison to his local counterparts, visible and prestigious. Superintendents are more widely known among the general public than the local congressman, and their salaries are normally higher than city managers. In contrast, public awareness of school board activity is slight. Most people cannot name anything their school board has done in the last year: most do not identify the board as being responsible for public representation within the school system, and a substantial minority (44 percent) do not think school boards have legal authority over school administrators.

Such confusion is reflected in the behavior of board members. Most board members do not view their role as representing, or speaking for "the public": rather they view their role as speaking <u>for</u> the administration <u>to</u> "the public". Such views are a natural consequence of reform. Lacking a constituency (as a consequence of at-large elections) and lacking a systematic recruitment mechanism (as a consequence of non-partisanship), they are normally recruited through the civic-business elite, sometimes by the existing board. They view their service as one of the civic responsibilities of the guardian class. Since, in most cases, boards have no independent staff, the agenda for meetings is

set by the administration. Setting the agenda is a highly significant political function, as it defines what is to be decided. It is therefore not surprising that school boards solicit and defer to policy recommendations from superintendents. School boards typically enact policies suggested by their professional staff in about 85 percent of the recorded votes. Such a percentage of success would be the envy of any president, governor, or mayor.

The bureaucratic system which characterized Phase 2 worked quite well as long as the goals of education were narrowly defined. When the shift from Phase 1 to Phase 2 began, the basic problem to be solved by educational planners was how to homogenize an immigrant population, to infuse it with a consistent set of values, to reduce conflict, in short, to manufacture a cohesive society. The problem then was comparable to the problem of "new" nations of today: how to create a nation from disparate groups with only a tenuous identification with the concept of a nation. In this situation, it was reasonable to replace community control of schools, which did not homogenize, with a central administration which could. As the late V.O. Key remarked, "All national educational systems indoctrinate the oncoming generation with the basic outlook and values of the political order."

The goal of Phase 2 was stability, not social change. Thus the schools, as agents of the transmission of knowledge, culture, and social norms, became conservative in that they served the function of maintaining the social order. However, in the last stages of Phase 2, new demands (and revivals of old demands) were placed on schools. From the federal government came the demand (beginning with Brown vs Board of

Education in 1954, but not achieving full implementation until the middle 1960's) that schools serve as agents of social change. From minority populations within local communities came demands that schools be "responsive." These demands ultimately took the form of the quest for "community control," and hence were not new; they were an inadvertent plea for a return to Phase 1.*

PHASE 3: THE NATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION

It was during this twilight of Phase 2 that the radical critiques of educational bureaucracy reached fever pitch. The proliferation of books critical of education reached saturation level, before tapering off in the early 1970's. As Phase 2 drew to a close, then, two irreconcilable sets of demands were being placed upon schools; that they serve as agents of social change, and that they return the schools to the people. To meet the latter good was to deny the former, as the major thrust for social change has never originated locally. In both sets of demands, however, the dominance of the superintendent was threatened.

As it turns out, the federal government proved more difficult for schools to resist than minority groups. The interest of the federal government was not in a shift in the structure of school governance, but in a transformation of the primary goal of public education. The federal government decided to use schools as instruments to achieve economic equality.

Phase 3, then, is characterized by an erosion of the legal authority of the local school administration by the imposition of federal

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* Ironically, teachers vigorously resisted demands for community control. They had resisted with equal vigor the abolition of community schools by the reformers.

(and occasionally state) mandates. To place the problem in perspective, the consequence of Phase 2 was a loss of lay control to the local superintendent who then, during Phase 3, lost control to extra-local units of government.

The intervention of the federal government in education has had a consistent pattern, whether the source of the intervention is the courts, the Congress, or the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The national government has intervened to increase the educational, and by inference economic, opportunity of deprived populations. In becoming the spokesmen for the underprivileged, the national government was responding to demands which local schools in Phase 2 could not meet. Being deliberately designed as non-responsive and insulated, they had little communication with established spokesmen of undereducated populations. As perpetuators of the status quo, schools had a vested interest in preferential education. Hence the federal government, the traditional defender of the downtrodden against the conservatism of local community power structures, took the role of advocacy for the underdog.

While the 1954 Brown decision was largely symbolic in its immediate effects, it eventually contributed greatly to black sense of self esteem and to a growing dissatisfaction because of the discrepancy between the stated purpose of the Brown decision and the reality of continued segregation. In addition to providing the stimulus for more radical black movements, the Brown decision shifted the arena of conflict and decision from local to national government. Henceforth, school administration would devote an increasing amount of energy into legal defense before federal courts, losing with each adverse decision the power

accumulated during Phase 2.

Local (that is, administrative) authority was further constrained by the establishment of desegregation guidelines in 1965 and 1966 by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Legal action initiated by HEW and the Justice Department established a highly visible base of federal influence. But even more important were the widespread but less publicized disputes over implementation between local districts and the mammoth HEW bureaucracy. The federal bureaucracy involved itself still further with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, (ESEA), which doubled the federal contribution to educational funding, and placed a strong monetary emphasis upon its concern with equality of educational opportunity. ESEA provided grants to local schools to meet the needs of "educationally deprived children" (Title I), and grants for "supplementary education centers and services" (Title III).

In its implementation, ESEA created a new pattern of interaction, which made the notion of lay control through school boards obsolete. Local schools, to compete for Title I and Title III grants, felt compelled to hire more administrators to write grant proposals. When proposals were funded, more administrators were hired to establish and maintain the programs. Thus, the local bureaucracy expanded to do business with a national bureaucracy. It is estimated that 25 percent of Title I and Title III money was expended for administrative salaries. In one urban district, the size of the administrative staff tripled between 1966 and 1975, while the number of students and staff remained constant. Relationships between the new sets of local and HEW bureaucrats were generally cordial; the influx of federal funds was welcome. Consider,

for example, Title I. Although audits have revealed gross misuse of Title I grants, rarely were such funds withheld. Because of this misuse of funds, national interest groups who spoke for the underprivileged threatened legal action. Once again, administrators began to prepare their defense; once again the school board became an irrelevant appendage. The game was being played in another ballpark.

The issues in Title I were those of compensatory education, a concept which had guided most federal efforts. However, at the same time, the efficacy of compensatory education was severely challenged by the Coleman Report. The assumption behind ESEA (and indeed the assumption underlying any intervention on the part of the undereducated) was that improving the quality of educational services (e.g., reducing teacher-pupil ratio, increasing library resources, etc.) affected the achievement of students and, ultimately, their economic opportunities. The Brown decision might have gone the other way if it could have been demonstrated that separate facilities were not inherently unequal. Blacks wanted to go to previously all-white schools because they thought their economic opportunities would be enhanced if they received the same education as whites. ESEA was based upon an assumption that, even if integration did not occur as rapidly as was hoped, compensatory education would fill the void.

The Coleman Report revealed, however, that differences in school facilities and curriculum were not related to the achievement of students. Logically, therefore, increased expenditures, and the various innovations supported by Title III of ESEA, were pointless. The most important single factor affecting achievement was family background, and the family background of fellow students. Further analysis revealed that black

children attending predominately black schools had lower achievement scores and lower aspirations than black students with comparable family backgrounds who attended white schools. The policy implications were clear. The only way to improve the educational, and hence economic, opportunities of blacks was to forcibly assign them to middle class white schools, or to assign middle class whites to black schools, or both.

Thus began the busing controversy. The leading advocate of busing was the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. Executive and legislative support ranged from neutral to obstructionist. However, the legal argument was sound, and court-ordered busing began, and with it the attendant violence and protests. There was no point in protesting to the superintendent, who could do nothing, so parents tried to influence the federal bureaucracy and courts, and finally, emulated the blacks of the 1960's and took to the streets. Their rhetoric was quite similar to the black demands of the late 1960's: Give us back our schools. However, as we have seen, this demand was three-quarters of a century too late.

Other factors contributed to the nationalization of schools during Phase 3. Successful challenges to local finance are becoming more frequent, although the issue is far from resolved. The thrust of these challenges uses the same rationale which underlies compensatory education. Since the largest source of school revenue is local property taxes (about 50 percent), wealthy districts can spend more per pupil than poor districts. Thus, equality of financial resources for education can only be achieved by statewide redistribution programs. Furthermore, since there is substantial variation in the wealth of states, the goal of nationwide

equality of educational opportunity may ultimately require a national system of school finance. As state and federal governments assume more control over financing education, opportunity for local populations to influence educational policy by voting for or against budgets will diminish, as will the opportunity for local administrators to set budgetary priorities.

Local administrators are experiencing an additional constriction of influence by the escalation of collective bargaining agreements between teachers' associations and administration. Such agreements are being expanded to include not only salary, but also course content, curriculum change procedures, teachers' evaluation, community participation, teaching procedures, and grievance procedure. As such agreements become more prevalent, the range of issues left for even the superintendent to discuss with the board will diminish. As the professional associations expand their collective voice, they are also moving to increase the teacher's organizational role in certification. Again, the authority of the superintendent is reduced.

PHASE 4: EDUCATION AND THE SOCIAL GOAL

Our sketch of the history of education in America has advanced the thesis that the pattern of authority over schools has changed in response to an expanding mandate given to public education. The mandate in Phase I was to pursue limited educational goals which would enable the individual to function in his small community. Administration was the province of local lay boards of education representative of the community. The mandate in Phase 2 was expanded: schools must provide skills and values necessary to construct a homogeneous, larger society.

Administrative responsibility shifted to local professionals who had the alleged expertise to achieve this goal. The mandate in Phase 3 was expanded further: schools must provide a basis for nationwide economic equality, or at least equality of economic opportunity. A corps of national educational professionals has grown in size and authority as a result of this most ambitious social goal.

There is a supreme irony about the struggle for influence during Phase 3. In spite of the Coleman Report--admittedly subject to many interpretations--that schools and individual achievement are unrelated, the contestants in the struggle continue to assume that they are. The evidence gradually accumulating strongly implies that the use of schools as agents of social change, specifically for the equalization of economic opportunity, cannot be successful. In 1972, Jenks' analysis concluded that school reform "cannot bring about significant social changes outside the schools." Jenks addressed himself explicitly to the goal of equal economic opportunity. Boudon echoed Jenks' conclusions by arguing that society (Jenks would argue for family), rather than schools, is responsible for inequality of economic opportunity. Boudon offered the astonishing conclusion that, "educational growth as such has the effect of increasing rather than decreasing social and economic inequality, even in the case of an educational system that becomes more equalitarian."

If these researchers are right--and we believe that they are--Phase 3 is misguided. If schools cannot serve as agents of social change, then the philosophical underpinnings of the federal intervention are flawed. What, then, for the future?

The first issue which must be resolved is the status of the social

goal of economic equality. If we retain the social goal there are two options.

(1) Accept the judgment that schools as now constituted cannot reduce inequality of economic opportunity, but also assume that they could if they were allowed to expand their sphere of control over the child. Specifically, schools would have to combat the disabling effects of class and family by assuming more control over the child at an earlier age. Formal schooling would have to begin as soon as cognitively feasible, and the role of the family would have to be minimized. School administration would, of necessity, be conducted at the national level by educational professionals.

(2) Accept the judgment that schools cannot reduce inequality of economic opportunity and abandon them as a means to this end. The goal could be achieved by several other means. We could establish political controls over economic institutions, a process normally referred to as socialism. Alternatively, we could simply reduce actual inequality by legislative fiat. For instance, Congress could legislate that no individual can receive less than $10,000 or more than $50,000 in annual income, and institute a system of reverse taxation to achieve this goal, bypassing the process of education entirely.

If we retain the social goal and insist on achieving it through the schools the consequence for school governance is increased centralization of decision locus and expansion of authority. If, however, we either abandon the social goal or abandon schools as the means of achieving it, several options for school governance are possible.

(1) We can retain the primacy of professional educational standards,

while increasing the importance of local concerns by returning to Phase 2. We can return the superintendent and local educational professionals to their former positions of influence and accept minimal parental control of the educational process.

(2) We can regard schooling as an end in itself and seek to make it as pleasant as possible for the student and parents. One way this can be achieved is by undoing the work of the reformers, that is, halt centralization and professionalization and return the schools to the conditions that existed prior to 1900. The result would be "community control."

(3) Another, more extreme, option, is to assume that, while education is a public good, and hence subject to public finance, the content and process of education are private matters. Thus, a system of vouchers could be instituted. Every parent could be given a governmental education voucher to be used for the child's education in any school, freely chosen by parents. Schools which could not successfully compete for vouchers would be closed. Private choice would thus be substituted for public choice. The result would be "individual control."

American education is in an untenable position because Phase 3 governance cannot achieve its mandate. Whether the goal of economic equality is retained or abandoned, a change in the pattern of control over education seems inevitable. The options range from extreme centralization to maximum individual control. However, in no case should the choice be clouded by unrealistic expectations about what formal education can accomplish.